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PROGRAM ABC World News Tonight STATION WJLA-TV  
ABC Network

DATE February 3, 1982 7:00 PM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT U.S. Military Options in El Salvador

FRANK REYNOLDS: The White House insisted today there are no current plans to send American troops to El Salvador, despite the clearly deteriorating situation there.

However, ABC News has learned the United States has another military option, one that does not involve the use of American troops. White House correspondent Sam Donaldson has that story.

SAM DONALDSON: Officials in the Reagan administration have approached the government of Argentina about the possibility of that country infiltrating combat forces into Nicaragua, according to a Congressional source.

The purpose: First, to choke off supplies from Cuba being transshipped to rebels in El Salvador; and second, if all went well, to mount a counter-revolution against the Nicaraguan ruling Sandinista leftist junta.

According to the source, such forces from Argentina would not wear uniforms, but would be infiltrated into Nicaragua as Latin American freedom fighters, and would operate covertly in guerrilla fashion.

The source does not know whether such talks with Argentina have led to any concrete action, or whether they ever will.

Asked about this story, a high-ranking White House official said, "We never comment on such stories one way or another." But the idea of working with other countries in Latin America to help El Salvador was expressly put forward yesterday on Capitol Hill by Secretary of State Haig.

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SECRETARY OF STATE ALEXANDER HAIG: Cooperating with our friends and allies in the region, we will do whatever is necessary to contain the threat.

DONALDSON: President Reagan has repeatedly tried to ease fears that American combat forces would be employed in Latin America.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: We have no plans for putting Americans in combat anywhere in the world.

DONALDSON: A White House spokesman said today the President still has no plans to send American combat forces anywhere -- no plans at the moment, he said.

But in fact, the advantage, from the administration's standpoint, of using Argentina forces to move against Nicaragua, would be that Americans would not be directly involved, thus avoiding a major domestic controversy and a possible Congressional veto under the War Powers Act.

Sam Donaldson, ABC News, the White House.